

Greetings...



*I*n the mid-1950s, the U.S. Congress began taking steps to turn the USDA's annual agricultural estimates into a professional, reliable, data collection and dissemination service. Since then, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has become an indispensable resource for local, state and national policy makers and agricultural professionals, charged with making decisions and plans for this important industry. At the Maryland Department of Agriculture, we are very pleased that the Maryland field office for NASS is located in our headquarters building in Annapolis. NASS and its staff have become solid partners and colleagues in our complimentary missions that ultimately serve the citizens of our state and nation.

In its early days, NASS and its precursor provided annual production and price estimates on the national level. Today, it provides a monthly forecast of major crop yields, and monthly price and livestock production estimates for each state using the most up-to-date data collection methodologies. This information has helped us to react intelligently to the challenges, opportunities and trends in agriculture. And it is with this information that we are able to predict that most segments of Maryland agriculture have a positive long-term outlook, despite the many pressures the industry faces.

The recent, booming interest in buying local foods has brought many citizens "back to the farm." More and more people – rural, urban and suburban – are learning more about where their food comes from, how it is produced and how the agriculture industry strengthens local and state economies while protecting our shared environment. As a result, many residents are developing a new respect for those who work the land and provide for us all. Farmers in Maryland continue to embrace the importance of restoring the Chesapeake Bay and incorporate the latest, scientifically proven, best management practices on their farms – something their counterparts in other areas of the country don't have to do.

Unbiased statistical information is essential to farmers, public policymakers, and economic developers who need to know how agricultural businesses are doing in the face of economic change, newly implemented farming practices, and, of course, bad weather. NASS has been instrumental in providing the objective information we need to help make the policy recommendations and develop the management practices necessary to make this vital economic segment profitable and sustainable.

We thank Maryland State Director Barbara Rater and the entire NASS staff for their dedication and commitment to their important work which, in turn, helps the State of Maryland strengthen its most important industry – agriculture.

Sincerely,


Earl F. Hance